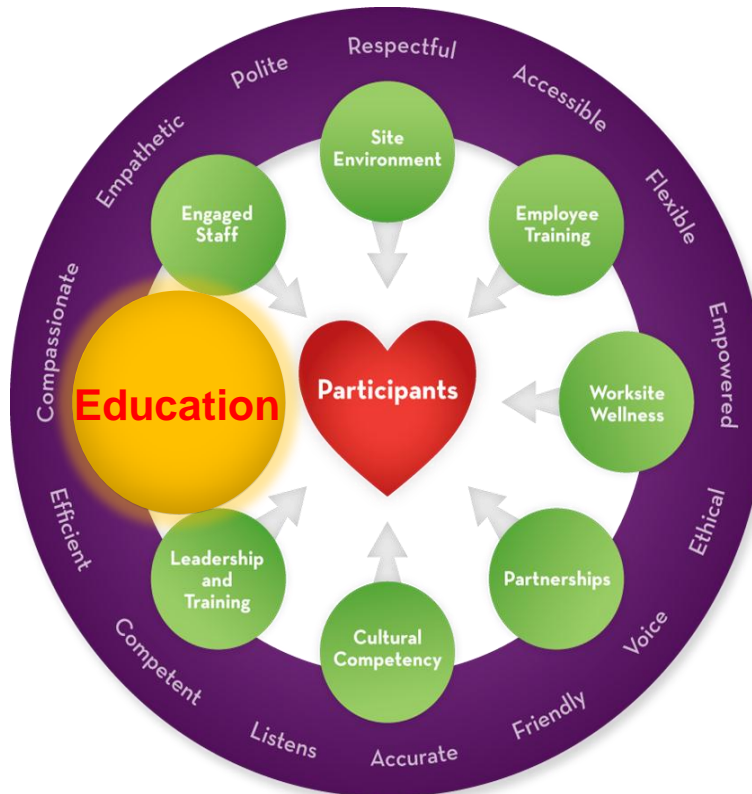


# Empathy

## Participant Centered Education Facilitator's Guide



This module is one in a series focusing on Participant-Centered Education (PCE). PCE is a key component of California WIC's effort to offer *Platinum WIC – Participant Centered Services (PCS)*. The California WIC PCS approach puts the WIC family at the center of everything we do and focuses on the strengths of participants, employees and community.

PCE places the participant at the center of the education process. PCE focuses on the participant's capabilities, strengths, and their nutrition, health, and referral needs, not just problems, risks, or unhealthy behaviors. PCE includes working collaboratively, eliciting and supporting motivation to change, and respecting participants as the ones who decide if and when they will learn and/or make a change.

## EMPATHY

Empathy is a core principle of PCE. Empathy refers to a person's understanding of and sensitivity to other peoples' feelings, thoughts, and situations. Studies show the most effective educators and counselors are those who can correctly identify another person's feelings and communicate this understanding back to the person, such that he or she *feels* understood. Empathy can and should be used throughout education sessions.

Empathy is needed to use the technique of reflection, and helps to communicate respect and safety. Empathy is critical for the PCE principle of compassion. Compassion is being aware of someone's suffering and wishing to help relieve it. Training on these additional topics will help reinforce the learning from this module.

### Trainer's Notes

#### **Purpose:**

To introduce the concept of empathy, and to practice recognizing how others may be feeling.

#### **Objectives:**

By the end of the session, staff will have:

- Reviewed the biological basis for empathy and its importance in working with WIC participants
- Practiced identifying what others might be feeling, a possible reason for these emotions, and how to communicate this understanding back to the person

#### **Materials:**

- "Empathy" Trainee Workbooks
- PowerPoint slides (or copies) of yawns and emotions

#### **Room Set Up:**

- Staff seated at tables or in small groups

#### **Directions:**

This module involves looking at a series of pictures of people for Activity 1: "Contagious Yawning" and Activity 4: "What are They Feeling?". You can show them as PowerPoint slides or print out copies of the pictures.

Also: There are 2 optional activities at the end of the module:

Activity 6: "Put Yourself in Their Shoes" invites staff to think about how they might judge certain participants, and ways to deal with these judgments.

NOTE: Decide in advance whether you would like your staff to share their judgments in pairs or trios, or to keep their thoughts private instead. This activity may bring up sensitive issues, and staff should feel safe enough to share their judgments.

Activity 7: "Emotional Empathy Survey" allows staff to rate their own emotional empathy levels. If you are interested in this activity, please go the following website: [http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/007040187x/student\\_view0/chapter3/self-assessment\\_3\\_10.html](http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/007040187x/student_view0/chapter3/self-assessment_3_10.html)



## 1. Contagious Yawning and Empathy Warm up: Activity 1

**Instruction:** Show the slide (or a print-out of the slide) of people yawning. Ask them to study it for 10 seconds.

**Say:** *How did this slide make people feel?*

**Hear** from a few staff in the large group.

**Say:** *Seeing a picture of someone yawning may actually make you yourself yawn.*

**Ask:** *How many people who yawned found themselves yawning when they looked at this slide?*

**Look for** show of hands.

**Say:** *This is known as "contagious yawning". There are times we yawn because we are tired, and there are times we yawn because we are influenced by someone else. It turns out that "contagious yawning" may be related to empathy.*

*Empathy is the ability to understand and be sensitive to other peoples' feelings, thoughts, and situations.*

*Some scientists have found that we are more likely to yawn if the other person who is yawning is a family member or a close friend. We are less likely to yawn when the other "yawner" is a stranger.*

*Another study found that children under 4 years old do not do "contagious" yawning. Neither do children with autism. This may be because children under four and autistic children usually cannot empathize with other people.*

### Empathy

A person's understanding of and sensitivity to the feelings, thoughts, and situation of others.



#### Quotes

*People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.*  
-- John Maxwell

*When you listen with empathy to another person, you give that person psychological air.* -- Steven Covey

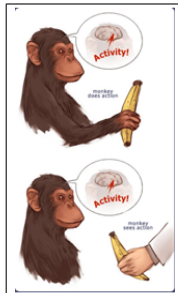
*Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?* -- Henry David Thoreau

*The great gift of human beings is that we have the power of empathy; we can all sense a mysterious connection to each other.* -- Meryl Streep

### Mirror Neurons and Empathy

Recent scientific studies have found that empathy may be a part of our brain structure. It turns out that we may have something called "mirror neurons" - brain cells which are activated in 2 ways: First, they are activated when we do an action, such as grabbing a banana or slipping on a wet floor. They are also activated simply by watching *someone else* do these activities. So in some way, we actually "feel" what we imagine the other person feels when they grab a banana or slip on the floor. Other animals, such as monkeys, also have these mirror neurons.

Empathy is critical to be effective when working with other people. Research has found that the most successful counselors can correctly identify what a patient or participant feels and then accurately let that patient/participant know that they are understood.



## 2. Empathy Quotes: Activity 2

**Instruction:** Ask staff to review the quotes about empathy in the workbook.

Invite them to **discuss** in pairs what they find meaningful about these quotes.

**Hear** from a few staff in the large group setting.

## 3. Mirror Neurons and Empathy: Activity 3

**Instruction:** Ask staff to review the information about mirror neurons and empathy in the workbook. Invite them to circle, underline or highlight anything that they find interesting or valuable about this information.

**Optional** – *you may show the slide with the pictures of the monkey and the banana*

**Hear** from a few staff in the large group.

**Say:** *In a moment you'll have a chance to practice with empathy...*

**Ask:** *but first, what questions do you have about empathy or anything we've discussed so far?*

### What Are They Feeling?

For each slide, write the emotion you think the person is feeling

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### What's their Story?


### Let Them Know You Understand


## 4. What are They Feeling? Practice Identifying Emotions: Activity 4

**Say:** *In a moment you will see a series of slides showing people with a variety of expressions. On the sheet in your workbook called "What are They Feeling?", write down what emotion you think they may be feeling. Some may seem easy and some more difficult. Just do your best.*

**Instruction:** **Show** staff all or some of the 28 slides. Pause about 5 seconds for each slide: they should have enough, but not too much time for each slide.

**NOTE:** There are no "right answers" - these photos didn't come with any explanations.

## 5. What's Their Story/Let Them Know You Understand: Activity 5

**a. Instruction:** **Assign** staff to work in **pairs or trios**. Ask them to pick 2-4 slides and try to **guess why** the person has the **feeling** shown in the picture. Encourage them to pick some slides with positive and some with negative emotions.

**b. Say:** *Now, suppose this was someone you were talking to. Maybe they are a WIC participant or someone else that you are trying to help.*

*What are some ways you can check to see if your guess is right? What might you say?*

**Instruction:** **Ask** pairs to talk about how they might let that person know that they understand them.

**After:** **Hear** from a few staff.

### Put Yourself in Their Shoes

1. What participant behaviors or actions do you feel most judgmental about?
2. Describe your judgment in detail, including your opinions about the behaviors/actions?
3. How does your judgment come across in the way you interact with certain participants?
4. What ideas do you have for managing and moving beyond judgments?

### 6. Put Yourself in Their Shoes (Optional Activity): Activity 6

**Instruction:** Ask staff to **answer** the questions for the “**Put Yourself in Their Shoes**” activity.

**Optional:** Ask staff to **discuss** in pairs or trios what they have written.

**After:** Hear from a few staff.

### 7. Optional: Emotional Empathy Survey

**NOTE:** See McGraw Hill Website link in the “Trainer’s Notes.”